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LETTER DATED 12 JANUARY 1993 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Five months ago the Security Council adopted resolution 770 (1992), as the Council was "Dismayed by the continuation of conditions that impede the delivery of humanitarian supplies to destinations within Bosnia and Herzegovina and the consequent suffering of the people of that country,". Regretfully, numerous reports indicate that conditions remain unchanged. Mr. Jose-Maria Mendiluce, UNHCR's director of relief operations in Bosnia and Hersegovina, confirmed the reports yesterday. He was quoted as saying that he had received "very alarming reports of deaths from cold and starvation" from wide areas, particularly eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Furthermore, pursuant to the said resolution, I wish to provide the attached report, from an independent source, New York Newsday of 11 January 1993, titled "Not Enough: UN Efforts for Bosnia Criticized", which raises serious concerns about UNPROFOR's ability and willingness to provide all measures necessary for delivery of humanitarian aid and warrants an urgent response from the Council.

With respect to the comments of Mr. Mendiluce, the attached report and the letter of a similar context, dated 30 December 1992, from the Director of the Office of Displaced Persons and Refugees of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (S/25029), and considering the operative paragraph 2 of the said resolution which "Calls upon States to take nationally or through regional agencies or arrangements all measures necessary to facilitate in coordination with the United Nations the delivery by relevant United Nations humanitarian organizations and others of humanitarian assistance to Sarajevo and wherever needed in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina;" we request that the Council issues a Presidential Statement:

- emphasizing the severity and urgency of the situation;

- requesting that UNPROFOR-participating States invoke fully resolution 770 (1992) in the delivery of humanitarian assistance;

- requesting that "air drops" of food, as requested by Mr. Mendiluce, commence immediately.

These steps are critical in saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. They are the only steps that will effectively and immediately deter the source of failure of past humanitarian deliveries which UNHCR is courageously working to overcome.

May I ask for your kind assistance in distributing this letter and its attachment as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Muhamed SACIRBEY
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

Annex
Article in the New York Newsday of 11 January 1993

Not Enough

UN efforts for Bosnia criticized

By Roy Gutman
EUROPE CORRESPONDENT

Zagreb, Croatia — Despite western pledges to keep Bosnians alive this winter, up to 200,000 Muslims in isolated enclaves have gotten little or no food and medicine from UN agencies, according to a U.S. aid worker who spent 12 days in the besieged town of Gorazde.

Indeed, the international relief effort has failed in eastern Bosnia, and the population is surviving thanks only to self-organized pack trains of men, women, children and horses, said William Steubner, who works for the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

"People would be absolutely starving if they had to depend on [UN] aid deliveries," he told New York Newsday yesterday. In Gorazde, which has a population of 70,000, and Srebrenica with 70,000 to 80,000, "they have not gotten enough aid," while in Zepa, the third Muslim enclave, with about 35,000 people, "they have gotten nothing."

Steubner was the first westerner to reach Gorazde since August, when Muslim forces broke the four-month Serbian siege. He went in with a pack train of 150 horses and 300 people Dec. 18. Moving in pitch darkness and subzero weather, the convoy covered 30 miles of narrow trails across mud, snow and ice in 15 hours. Each horse carried up to 440 pounds of cargo and each human between 50 and 85 pounds. Women and boys as young as 12 carried the supplies, he said. On four occasions, the entire convoy had to backtrack and change routes when the leader, a local elementary school principal named Hasan Turcilo, spotted mines ahead.

Steubner concluded from his 12-day stay that Gorazde's population of 70,000 might make it through the winter chiefly because its ill-equipped military force managed to push back the Serb forces and create a sizable pocket under its own control.

UN food and medicine deliveries are at best a "pittance" that supplements the self-help effort, Steubner said. The town's records showed that from summer to mid-December, the UN had delivered 7.7 pounds of flour per capita, two pints of oil, one pound of beans, one pound of sugar, and two bars of soap.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees says it sent in seven convoys from Belgrade since mid-November. Each contained about 100 tons of supplies. Steubner said the town's meticulous records showed a far smaller quantity arrived. "Either they are faking the whole thing, or it's [the aid] all being diverted and no one's telling them."

As serious as Gorazde's plight is, Steubner met couriers who told of far worse conditions elsewhere, the most perilous being Zepa on the border of western Serbia.

Last Thursday, a ham radio operator in Zepa sent out a dramatic SOS. "About 5,000 citizens of Zepa and 30,000 refugees now face complete destruction. Every day, there is shelling the entire day from all kinds of weapons. In the last two days, 40 persons died of hunger, mostly children," said the message, monitored in Zagreb by officials of the Muslim charity Merhamet.

The ham operator, Fadil Heljic, said, moreover, this might be his last appeal, because his radio's batteries were all but dead. The appeal is only the latest. Steubner said he heard from couriers that parents in Zepa have been forced to choose which of their children to abandon in order that the others might live. And Sevko Omerbasic, the head of the Muslim community in Croatia, said last week that food is in such short supply in Zepa "that they kill each other for a piece of fruit."

Zepa, situated on a mountain plateau near the border with Serbia, has been surrounded by Serb forces since February and has not received any supplies since then. The UN High Commission for Refugees had planned to send a convoy the day that message arrived. Officials in Belgrade at the last minute changed their plans and decided to send the supplies to another enclave, Cerska.

But Bosnian Serb officials in Belgrade "suggest strongly we not try [to reach either town] for reasons of our own security," said Lindall Sachs, a spokeswoman. She said the UN agency canceled the convoy and rescheduled it for Jan. 14, next Thursday. But another UN agency official said it had been postponed indefinitely.

"We've heard fairly dramatic reports about children dying of starvation and cold in Zepa," Sachs said. "But we have limited trucking capacity and we cover a very wide area. We have very urgent public concerns for Sarajevo. If we don't succeed there, the world will scream blue murder."

Sarajevo radio said yesterday that nearly 200 people had died of cold and hunger in five mainly Muslim pockets of eastern Bosnia the 24 hours up to noon yesterday. The statement was based on ham radio reports from Zepa, Srebrenica, Cerska, Konjevic Polje and Kamenica.

Steubner, 44, is a retired 20-year Army veteran whose last foreign assignment, from 1987 to 1990, was as a military aide at the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador. He said he got a warm welcome when he arrived in Gorazde.

The downtown was "decimated," he said. The main hotel and a sports center were completely destroyed, and the city hospital "looks like a piece of Swiss cheese." "They really hit the hospital a lot," he said. Most was direct fire, from a hill above the city.

Official city records showed that 2,500 people were killed during the siege, and 10,000 badly wounded. About 85 percent of the injuries were sustained by civilians, 70 percent of them caused by incoming artillery. Safet Cibo, the only surgeon at Gorazde hospital, told Steubner that he had performed 256 major operations in the past three months — for much of the

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Food is in such short supply in Zepa 'that they kill each other for a piece of fruit.'

time without anesthesia.

Based on extensive talks with town officials and examination of their records and his own observations, Steubner concluded the average resident had lost 33 pounds in weight. A hospital obstetrician told him proudly he had delivered 300 babies and lost only two since summer, but that birthweight is down to 5.6 pounds from an average of 7.5 pounds. Babies near a year old weigh on average only 11 pounds, and infant mortality in the first year has reached a staggering 20 percent. He said mothers cannot nurse due to malnutrition, and they can obtain milk only from a farmer's market, where a quart costs $3 in hard currency. "They are desperate for baby food, powdered milk and milk bottles. And they begged for contraceptive pills because the doctors there hate to perform abortions," Steubner said. Gorazde is also desperately short of medicine, he said.

But through exceptionally good organization and with the help of human and packhorse convoys, which now run three times a week but will shortly increase to every day, it has survived. But even that supply line is now threatened because ice and snow have made the journey far more perilous and the packhorses are dying because they cannot be properly fed. On Steubner's trip out Jan. 29, four of the nine horses died of exhaustion or injury from slipping on the ice.

Gorazde still comes under sporadic daily artillery bombardment from Serb positions in four surrounding towns, but it is quiet compared to the siege last summer. There is ample firewood in the nearby forests. The main fear of people is that they will be worn down and depleted come spring, will have to slaughter their livestock, and may have no seed to plant or fuel to operate farm or other vehicles.

Steubner's observations highlight growing questions about the UN agency's ability to sustain Bosnia through the winter. The Security Council ordered more than 6,000 troops from NATO countries to Bosnia-Herzegovina in September to protect deliveries from the UN agency to beleaguered communities. But the agency, trained to sustain refugees in peaceful conditions and now operating in war zones, has been reluctant to decide when to confront Bosnian Serbs and Croats who block the routes into Muslim enclaves.

The UN agency has tried to avoid a showdown with the heavily armed Serbs. "We don't like the idea of using force to get through. If we do it once, it puts in jeopardy our entire operation," said Sacha.

NEW YORK NEWSDAY, MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 1993